

Nixon's Tragedy:

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Personal And National

By Don Oakley

In the first 185 years of this nation's history since the adoption of the Constitution, seven presidents out of 36 did not complete their terms of office — three because of natural death, four struck down by an assassin's bullet. Now, for the first time, a chief executive has removed himself through resignation.

Richard M. Nixon, 37th President of the United States, the man who once had every expectation of ushering in America's third century of independence in 1976, facing almost certain impeachment and conviction by Congress, subjected to intense pressure at the end even from those who throughout his career had been his strongest supporters, has yielded to the inevitable.

The two-year-long national ordeal we call Watergate has thus reached the denouement that many feared when the President was first implicated in the unfolding scandal, that more and more voices began calling for as the months passed and the evidence against him mounted and his every defense collapsed, that some may have hoped for but no one, not even his most inveterate enemies, takes any joy in.

Despite the inevitability of this unprecedented event, despite all the signs and portents that were plain to read over the past few weeks and days, the nation is in a state of profound shock at what has happened. And while the trauma we are now experiencing cannot be compared with the sudden, unexpected and wholly unreasonable removal of the nation's leader at the hands of an assassin, there is no less cause for mourning.

When a giant falls, the earth shakes. And make no mistake about it, Richard Nixon, for good or ill, was a giant of a president. But his greatness, unfortunately, was the greatness of an Aaron Burr, not of a Jefferson. Like an epic figure in a Greek tragedy, his down fall was his own doing, the result of a fundamental flaw in character which, we can see now, made him unfit for the high office his undoubted talents and energies enabled him to attain.

At the pinnacle of the American political system, wielding more power than any single man in the entire world, swept to a second term by an overwhelming mandate from his fellow citizens, Richard Nixon nevertheless stooped to the shoddy and unsavory behavior of a kind that one might expect from the lowliest ward heeler.

There was not only Watergate and the President's attempts to shield subordinates he should have been the first to expose. Here

was a man who had been accorded the highest honor it is in the power of Americans to bestow slashing his tax returns through dubious loopholes as if mere money could possibly bring him anything he did not already have. Though the President's tax troubles did not figure in his impending impeachment, it was one more factor in the decay of the people's trust and respect.

There was, finally and above all, Mr. Nixon's playing false with the American people — his repeated assurances of his own innocence and of his desire to "get to the bottom of Watergate" even as he withheld evidence and impeded the investigation until, after two years, it was no longer possible to deceive and delay.

That, in the end, was that was unforgivable.

Yet even now it is not apparent that Richard Nixon fully appreciates the nature of what has befallen him, and through him, the nation. To his dying day, he may well believe that he was the victim of a massively orchestrated plot by the press and his political foes to subject him to the ultimate humiliation of forced removal from the presidency. In his own eyes he may be a martyr who, for the welfare of the nation, made the grandiose gesture of resigning.

If so, the personal tragedy of Richard Nixon is only compounded the more.

What of America's tragedy? We now enter a long period of national recuperation. We are fortunate in having as new president a man who is not only acceptable to the millions who voted for Richard Nixon but a man around whom all Americans can rally. (The selection of Gerald Ford could, in fact, turn out to be the best thing Richard Nixon ever did for his country.)

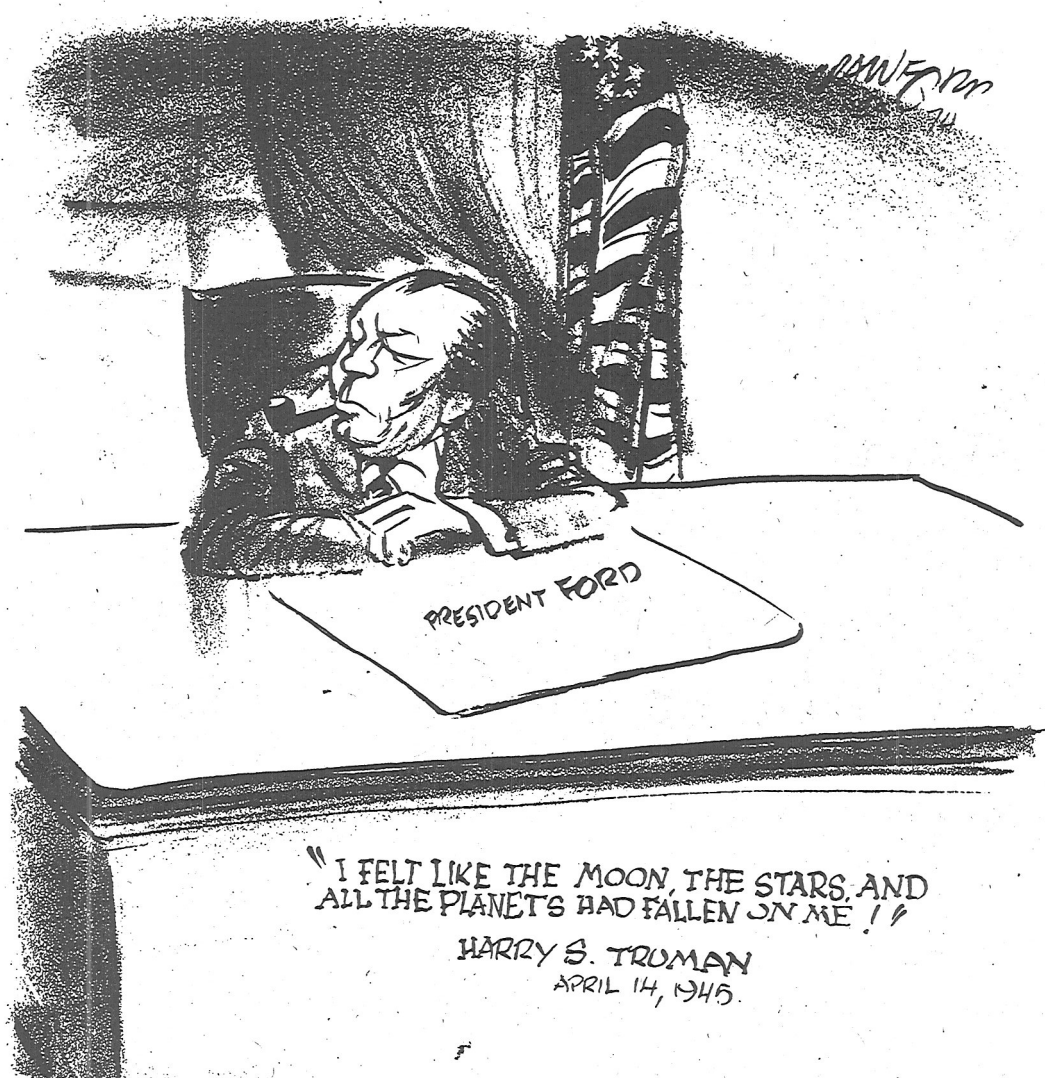
Wounded as the nation is, it goes forward under a Constitution that is more alive and more valid than ever. Honesty and integrity are still valued in America, still expected and demanded of those to whom we entrust leadership.

America will emerge stronger and better and more truly free because of this ordeal.

(NEWSPAPER ENTERPRISE ASSN.)

TIMELY QUOTES

We often pray for purity, unselfishness, for the highest qualities of character, and forget that these things cannot be given, but must be earned. — Lyman Abbott, American clergyman.



"I FELT LIKE THE MOON, THE STARS, AND
ALL THE PLANETS HAD FALLEN ON ME!!"

HARRY S. TRUMAN
APRIL 14, 1945.